

[\[How's this working for you?\] Action\(s\)!](#)

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(Almost) Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Actions

Over the years, there's been a number of rules questions that really were their individual topics. But, as so often, they all boiled down to one thing: understanding how Actions work in **Earthdawn**. So I compiled some of them below, but included a more important general section that has the basic information about Actions in **Earthdawn Third Edition**—because, let's face it, we're all pretty quick skipping the section of the book we've read one to three editions ago...

The Basics

This first bit gives you a general overview of Actions in **Earthdawn**.

A Bit of History

In the beginning, **Earthdawn** didn't really have Actions as we know them today. As in Third Edition, you had one Standard Action, and an ability either used that Standard Action, or it didn't (the characteristics of a talent would say "Action: Yes" or "Action: No"). You can still see this today in forum discussions at times. When someone talks about something "being an action", they usually refer to the Standard Action. Simply making the difference between yes and no had some side-effects. For example, there was no indication to how and when an ability could be used, and how long it took to perform, except in the ability's description. Similarly, the rules for combat prompted the group to "Declare Actions" at the start of the round, so some took this as announcing their Standard Action or all their Actions (which is not the case, see much further below). For these and other reasons, in Third Edition, we introduced a more elaborate system.

Where We Are Now

The main intent of the rules has not changed much, however. The most important aspect is still whether or not an ability uses your Standard Action or not. Differentiating between four types of Actions simply serves to answer the "how, when, and how long does it take" questions, and gives you a couple of options to better judge and limit what a character can do right now. It is also important to know that Actions are treated as a commodity of sorts that you can spend. If you want to use something, you "spend" the type of Action it requires before making the test. The Action is spent whether or not you are successful.

Now, here's some things to know about the four types of Actions:

Standard Action: You get just the one, and it's important to realize that, by the way the rules are set up, it governs many of the other Actions you can perform in a round. If your Standard Action is a close combat attack, there's usually no way to mix an additional ranged attack in there. In a way, it governs your tactics for the rest of the round. Your Standard Action is always performed on your Initiative Count, when you take your turn.

Sustained Action: These are also Standard Actions, but several of them. This means that you need to "spend" several Standard Actions before making the test for the ability. Often, the exact number is not defined. This is because most abilities requiring a Sustained Action are not really intended to be used in combat. So, when looking at your character sheet for something that might help you out in a dire situation, the entry tells you that the ability probably won't help you just now.

Simple Action: Simple Actions usually complement your Standard Action. These might be additional attacks, abilities that enhance your attacks, your normal movement, and so on. It is important to note that these, too, have to be taken when it is your turn, though they can be performed before or after your Standard Action. You have an unlimited amount of these, except if your group uses the **Action Cap** optional rule (*Player's Guide*, p. 217).

Free Action: Unlike the other Actions, Free Actions are always unlimited, and you can use them at any time, even when it is not your turn—they are the only actions you can use that way! Free Actions are, however, situational, often triggered by other events. Most importantly, all your primary defensive abilities (Avoid Blow, Parry, Resist Taunt, etc.) use a Free Action. So, you can understand them as "reactions" – and many games call such things reactions – but there are some Free Actions that are not reactions, such as speaking. Also, most abilities that substitute themselves for parts of a Damage Test (Crushing Blow, Surprise Strike, etc.) are Free Actions. This is because Free Actions break the normal order of things. You cannot normally perform a Simple Action in the middle or another Action, but you can with a Free Action. For example, you cannot make a Melee Weapons Attack Test, then use Anticipate Blow, and then make the Damage Test. But you can make a Melee Weapons Attack Test, your target may interrupt it with a Riposte, and you yourself may re-interrupt with a Riposte.

Why is This a Free/Simple Action?

Sometimes, you may find that an ability seems to use the wrong kind of Action. Compared to other abilities (or, if a creature, compared to how characters do things), something says it uses a Free or Simple Action, but by all means, it should use a Standard Action.

Well, that may well be because it does, but you just didn't notice. The ability in question will often list another ability it is based on, where you have to use that other ability first. You can find this most often for creature Powers. The power may list that it is a Free or Simple Action, and that it requires a Spellcasting Test. In this case, the Spellcasting Test uses a Standard Action as normal. This means the power requires a Standard Action by virtue of requiring a Spellcasting Test; it acts similar to an Effect Test for a spell.

So, if ability X says to make a Test for ability Y, and if ability Y requires a Standard Action, you actually have to "spend" that Standard Action. You do not merely use the Step of ability Y to resolve the effects of ability X. You actually and actively use ability Y.

Rule of thumb: If you roll the step of something, you must "spend" the Action it requires (unless it explicitly says otherwise).

This Doesn't Say What Action it Uses!

Sometimes, indeed, we forget things (but also see the above entry). Sometimes, though, it also boils down to what the description says you do, and if that's covered by the general rules for Actions (*Player's Guide*, p. 215).

If in doubt, such an ability usually uses a Simple Action.

Individual Issues

Here's a collection of specific problems that have come up in rules questions over the years.

Creature Actions

Creatures just list a number of Actions they have, for example "Actions: 3"; what types of Actions are these? Also, they do not list the same attack abilities as characters, they just list that they have an Attack Step, do they always use that one?

Their "Actions" entry lists the number of Standard Actions per round, and each of their attacks made with their basic "Attack" entry uses up a Standard Action. For example, a creature that has "Actions: 3" can make three attacks with the Step listed under "Attack", directly under the "Actions" entry.

However, Attack is not necessarily all they can spend these Standard Actions on, nor are their attacks limited to this number: When a creature has a Power or wants to undertake an action that uses a Standard Action (such as standing up from knockdown), they may spend one of their "Actions" on it. They can even do things impossible to player characters. For example, a Horror with "Actions: 3" could, all in one turn, stand up, weave a thread, and cast the spell. Likewise, if a creature has a Power that allows for an additional attack without spending a Standard Action, it can perform this attack in addition to the regular ones, though it'll use its own Step Number. For example, a spirit may very well have the Second Attack talent as a Power; if it has "Actions: 2" and this Power, it could make three attacks.

Defensive Abilities

I can only use Avoid Blow once against an Attack, but I can still use Parry if I fail, right? Or Shield Mist? Or Spirit Dodge?

Most often, you can't combine these.

Some talents say they cannot be combined with another talent. But any explicit list (mentioning talent names) is mostly for convenience's sake. The more important rules say that a talent, for example, "cannot be combined with another talent that does something similar" (and judging that would be up to you). For defensive abilities, we have not started listing anything, because an explicit list would have to include defensive talents that may not even exist yet. Instead, you'll find the governing rule with the general rules for Free Actions (*Player's Guide*, p. 216), where it says that you can only use one such ability against any one attack. So, no, once your Avoid Blow failed, you can't Parry it any more. The rule is a bit vague, however, because there are defensive abilities that you do not actively perform. Shield Mist and Spirit Dodge serve as good examples here: Shield Mist says you make the Effect Test as an Avoid Blow Test. So all the rules of Avoid Blow apply for that test. Once you failed to Avoid Blow or Parry, Shield Mist won't help you. Spirit Dodge, however, doesn't mention Avoid Blow. And it says it's not really the character doing things, it's really the spirit. There's some talk of a Free Action, but that only tells you that you can do it at any time, and serves to distinguish it from the Standard Action used to conjure the spirit (because of the rule of thumb that if you roll the dice, you spend the Action—but you don't spend the Standard Action when rolling the Spirit Dodge Step to dodge). So, you can use Spirit Dodge if your Avoid Blow failed. Or, rather, you have to...

Can I Drink That Healing Potion?

I can draw a weapon as a Simple Action, so I can drink a healing potion for free, right?

Sorry, you can't. Because it's always been left open, in Third Edition, we have introduced a general rule that using any healing aid is at least a Standard Action. Even if you already have the potion in your mouth, swallowing it is still a Standard Action. This should speed up combat a bit, and makes healing talents and abilities more valuable.

Declaring Actions

So, what's this "Declare Actions" thing about, then?

For the briefest possible answer: it's not about the four Action types, and it never was in previous editions.

If you look closely, we capitalize "Action" wherever we mean Standard, Sustained, Simple, or Free Actions. The Combat Summary (*Player's Guide*, p. 214) uses the non-capitalized "actions" when it talks about declaring things, and this describes the general activities (for lack of a better word) you intend to perform during a round. The examples given are in the vicinity of "I attack" or "I cast a spell", but not "I use Melee Weapons, Anticipate Blow, and Crushing Blow". You only announce specific talents, skills, and so on when it is your turn, and only to inform everybody what you are doing.

The declaring actions phase most importantly serves to announce if you are using a Combat Option, and this is practically the only thing you have to call out by name at that time. The reason is that combat options usually last the entire round, so they take effect even before you normally act. Similarly, some talents with an effect on Initiative require you to perform specific actions. For example, Cobra Strike allows you a higher Initiative Result, but for close combat only, so you have to announce close combat actions before rolling Initiative.

The declare actions phase is something you can entirely skip if your characters do not normally use a lot of combat options (any who do could announce them when rolling Initiative) and if they do not have a lot of different options (single-Discipline low-Circle characters usually don't).

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